

8th Grade ELA STEAM Integration

Unit 1: Themes in Short Stories

Topic: Engineering Design

Time: 3 Days

Standards:

RL.8.1 – Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.8.2 – Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

W.8.1 – Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

W.8.4 – Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

RL.8.3 – Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

MS-ETS1-1 – Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem.

MS-ETS1-2 – Evaluate competing design solutions.

ISTE Standard 1.6 – Creative Communicator – Students create original works or responsibly repurpose digital resources to express themselves.

Objective

What if a character made a different decision? In this challenge, students design a mechanical or interactive model that represents a moral decision point from one short story and physically shows two alternate outcomes, one based on the text, the other based on a student-generated revision.

Lesson Outline

Day 1: Character Choice + Prototype Sketching

1. Read & Analyze (15–20 min)
 - Choose a turning point (e.g., Roger’s decision not to run in *Thank You Ma’am*).
 - Use a decision map to sketch two branches:
 - “Original outcome” vs. “Alternate scenario”
 - List consequences, theme, tone, and message
2. Engineering Challenge Introduction (10 min)
 - Students will create a “Choice Simulator” that physically demonstrates the two possible outcomes.
 - Must represent theme visually.
3. Sketch Blueprint (20–25 min)
 - Label key pieces: starting point, decision fork, and end results
 - Annotate symbolic elements (e.g., sliding doors for open/closed options, color codes, icons)

Day 2: Building the Simulator

1. Build Phase (45–60 min)
 - Cardboard, string, craft supplies, LEGOs, or digital via Tinkercad
 - Include labels or interactive features
 - One path must reflect the story’s theme accurately; the other may be speculative
2. Mid-build Check-in (Optional rubric preview)
 - Ask students:



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- “How does this design reflect the character’s theme or arc?”

Day 3: Present + Reflect

1. “Design Debrief” Presentations (15–20 min)

- Students present models to small groups or whole class
- Must describe:
 - The moment of choice
 - The outcome paths
 - The visual representation of theme

2. Gallery Walk + Reflection (20 min)

- Use sentence starters:
 - “I now see this character’s decision differently because...”
 - “The alternate outcome made me think about...”

